



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Kent County Implements New State Waiver Requirement for Schools**

**GRAND RAPIDS** – The Kent County Health Department implemented the new state waiver requirements for unvaccinated children, which includes an educational meeting with health department staff. Starting January 1, 2015, parents who do not vaccinate their children must now obtain a certified non-medical waiver from a local health department in order for their children to attend school. All schools and childcare providers will be receiving information on the new rules from the state and here from the Kent County Health Department.

While parents can object to vaccines for religious or medical reasons, Michigan is one of the few states in the country that allows waivers based on philosophical reasons. Michigan has the fourth highest waiver rate in the U.S. “The new requirement assures parents receive credible, scientific information about immunizations in order for their children to attend schools in Michigan,” said Adam London, Administrative Health Officer of the Kent County Health Department. “Previously, it was too easy for parents to opt-out with little knowledge of the importance of vaccines. The internet is a great tool for education, but it also allows for myths and misinformation to be spread.”

Fortunately, Kent County schools have one of the best in rates in the state for childhood vaccinations, with only a 3% waiver rate in 2014. In one Michigan county that recently dealt with pertussis and measles outbreaks, the waiver rate was 11%.

At least one parent refusing vaccine(s) for the child will be required to meet with health department staff for an educational session. Staff will share information about vaccines and the diseases they prevent. Parents refusing to vaccinate children can only sign the current state waiver form, and it may not be altered in any way. The waiver must be certified by the local health department. The waiver says the parent understands:

- The purpose of the recommended vaccination;
- The risks and benefits of the recommended vaccination;
- The possible consequences of not allowing the child to receive the recommended vaccination, which may include contracting the illness the vaccine is intended to prevent and transmitting the disease to others.

“These educational sessions are meant to educate, not harass, a parent refusing vaccination for their children,” London said. “These sessions will take a small amount of time; a tiny investment that could have life-saving effects on some families.” Information on the new policy can be found at [www.accesskent.com/immunizations](http://www.accesskent.com/immunizations) under the School/Childcare Resources.

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KCHD has been in the business of providing health services to Kent County since 1931. The Health Department is home to nearly 260 employees including public health nurses, sanitarians, health educators, technicians, public health administrators, and specialized staff at the Kent County Animal Shelter. The Health Department operates one main clinic and three satellite clinics located in Kentwood, Rockford, and Grand Rapids. To learn more about KCHD services, visit [www.accesskent.com/health](http://www.accesskent.com/health).